

# The Nation

## Reviews.

### THE OFFICE OF THE POETS.

"A New Study of English Poetry." By Sir HENRY NEWBOLT. New edition. (Constable. 12s. 6d. net.)

THERE is—at least, there seems to be—more cant talked about poetry just now than at any previous time. Tartuffe is to-day not a priest but a poet—or a critic. Or, perhaps, Tartuffe is too lively a prototype for the curates of poetry who swarm in the world's capitals at the present hour. There is a tendency in the followers of every art or craft to impose it on the world as a mystery of which the vulgar can know nothing. In medicine, as in bricklaying, there is a powerful trade union into which the members can retire as into a sanctuary of the initiate. In the same way, the theologians took possession of the temple of religion and refused admittance to laymen, except as a meek and awestruck audience. This largely resulted from the Pharisaic instinct that assumes superiority over other men. Pharisaism is simply an Imperialism of the spirit—joyless and domineering. Religion is a communion of immortal souls. Pharisaism is a denial of this and an attempt to set up an oligarchy of inferior persons. All the great religious reformations have been rebellions on the part of the immortal souls against the superior persons. Religion, the reformers have vaguely felt, is the common possession of mankind. Christ came into the world not to afford a career to theological pedants, but that the mass of mankind might have life and might have it more abundantly.

Poetry is in constant danger of suffering the same fate as religion. In the great ages of poetry, poetry was what is called a popular subject. The greatest poets, both of Greece and of England, took their genius to that extremely popular institution, the theatre. They wrote not for pedants or any exclusive circle, but for mankind. They were, we have reason to believe, under no illusions as to the imperfections of mankind. But it was the best audience they could get, and represented more or less the same kind of world that they found in their own bosoms. It is a difficult thing to prove that the ordinary man can appreciate poetry, just as it is a difficult thing to prove that the ordinary man has an immortal soul. But the great poets, like the great saints, gave him the benefit of the doubt. If they had not, we should not have had the Greek drama or Shakespeare.

That they were right seems probable in view of the excellence of the poems and songs that survive among a peasantry that has not been de-educated in the schools. If the arts were not a natural inheritance of simple people, neither the Irish love-songs collected by Dr. Douglas Hyde nor the Irish music edited by Moore could have survived. I do not mean to suggest that any art can be kept alive without the aid of such specialists as the poet, the singer, and the musician; but neither can it be kept healthily alive without the popular audience. Tolstoy's use of the unspoiled peasant as the test of art may lead to absurdities, if carried too far. But at least it is an error in the right direction. It is an affirmation of the fact that every man is potentially an artist just as Christianity is an affirmation of the fact that every man is potentially a saint. It is also an affirmation of the fact that art, like religion, makes its appeal to feelings which are shared by the mass of men rather than the feelings which are the exclusive possession of the few. Where Tolstoy made his chief mistake was in failing to see that the artistic sense, like the religious sense, is something that, so far from being born perfect, even in the unspoiled peasant, passes through stage after stage of labor and experience on the way to perfection. Every man is an artist in the seed: he is not an artist in the flower. He may pass all his life without ever coming to flower. The great artist, however, appeals to a universal potentiality of beauty.

Tolstoy's most astounding paradox came to nothing more than this—that art exists, not for the hundreds of people who are artists in name, but for the millions of people who are artists in embryo.

At the same time, there is no use in being too confident that the average man will ever be a poet, even in the sense of being a reader of poetry. All that one can ask is that the doors of literature shall be thrown open to him as the doors of religion are, in spite of the fact that he is not a perfect saint. The histories of literature and religion, it seems likely, both go back to a time in which men expressed their most rapturous emotions in dances. In time the inarticulate shouts of the dancers—Scottish dancers still utter those shouts, do they not?—gave place to rhythmic words. It may have been the genius of a single dancer that first broke into speech, but his genius consisted not so much in his separateness from the others as in his power to express what all the others felt. He was the prophet of a rapture that was theirs as much as his own.

Men learned to speak rhythmically, however, not merely in order to liberate their deepest emotions, but in order to remember things. Poetry has a double origin in joy and utility. The "Thirty days hath September" rhyme of the English child suggests the way in which men must have turned to verse in pre-historic times as a preservative of facts, of proverbial wisdom, of legend and narrative. Sir Henry Newbolt, it seems, would deny the name of poetry to all verse that is not descended from the choric dance. In my opinion it is better to recognize the two lines, both of the father and the mother, in the pedigree of poetry. We find abundant traces of them not only in Hesiod and Virgil, but in Homer and Chaucer. The utility of form and the joy of form have in all these poets become inextricably united. The objection to most of the "free verse" that is being written to-day is that in form it is neither delightful nor memorable. The truth is, the memorableness of the writings of a man of genius becomes a part of their delight. If Pope is a delightful writer it is not merely because he expressed interesting opinions; it is because he threw most of the energies of his being into the task of making them memorable and gave them a heightened vitality by giving them rhymes. His satires and "The Rape of the Lock," are, no doubt, better poetry than the "Essay on Man," because he poured into them a still more vivid energy. But I doubt if there is any reasonable definition of poetry which would exclude even Pope the "essayist" from the circle of the poets. He was a puny poet, it may be, but then poets were always, as they are to-day, of all shapes and sizes.

Unfortunately, "poetry," like "religion," is a word that we are almost bound to use in several senses. Sometimes we speak of "poetry" in contradistinction to prose: sometimes in contradistinction to bad poetry. Similarly, "religion" would in one sense include the Abode of Love as opposed to rationalism, and in another sense would exclude the Abode of Love as opposed to the religion of St. James. In a common-sense classification, it seems to me, poetry includes every kind of literature written in verse or in rhythms akin to verse. Sir Thomas Browne may have been more poetic than Erasmus Darwin, but in his best work he did not write poetry. Erasmus Darwin may have been more prosaic than Sir Thomas Browne, but in his most famous work he did not write prose. Sir Henry Newbolt will not permit a classification of this kind. For him poetry is an expression of intuitions—an emotional transfiguration of life—while prose is the expression of a scientific fact or a judgment. I doubt if this division is defensible. Everything that is literature is, in a sense, poetry as opposed to science; but both prose and poetry contain a great deal of work that is preponderantly the result of observation and judgment, as well as a great deal that is preponderantly imaginative. Poetry is a house of many mansions. It includes fine poetry and foolish poetry, noble poetry and base poetry. The chief

duty of criticism is the praise—the infectious praise—of the greatest poetry. The critic has the right to demand not only a transfiguration of life, but a noble transfiguration of life. Swinburne transfigures life in "Anactoria" no less than Shakespeare transfigures it in "King Lear." But Swinburne's is an ignoble, Shakespeare's a noble transfiguration. Poetry may be divine or devilish, just as religion may be. Literary criticism is so timid of being accused of Puritanism that it is chary of admitting that there may be a Heaven and a Hell of poetic genius as well as a religious genius. The moralists go too far on the other side and are tempted to judge literature by its morality rather than by its genius. It seems more reasonable to conclude that it is possible to have a poet of genius who is nevertheless a false poet, just as it is possible to have a prophet of genius who is nevertheless a false prophet. The lover of literature will be interested in them all, but he will finally be deceived into blindness to the fact that the greatest poets are spiritually and morally, as well as aesthetically, great. If Shakespeare is infinitely the greatest of the Elizabethans, it is not merely because he is imaginatively the greatest; it is also because he had a soul incomparably noble and generous. Sir Henry Newbolt deals in an interesting way with this ennoblement of life that is the mark of great poetry. He does not demand of poetry an orthodox code of morals, but he does contend that great poetry marches along the path that leads to abundance of life, and not to a feeble and degenerate egotism.

The greatest value of his book, however, lies in the fact that he treats poetry as a natural human activity, and that he sees that poetry must be able to meet the challenge to its right to exist. The extreme moralist would deny that it had a right to exist unless it could be proved to make men more moral. The hedonist is content if it only gives him pleasure. The greatest poets, however, do not accept the point of view either of the extreme moralist or of the hedonist. Poetry exists for the purpose of delivering us neither to good conduct nor to pleasure. It exists for the purpose of releasing the human spirit to sing, like a lark, above the scene of wonder, beauty and terror. It is consonant both with the world of good conduct and the world of pleasure, but its song is a voice and an enrichment of the earth, uttered on wings half-way between earth and heaven. Sir Henry Newbolt suggests that the reason why hymns almost always fail as poetry is that the writers of hymns turn their eyes away so resolutely from the earth we know to the world that is only a formula. Poetry, in his view, is a transfiguration of life heightened by the home-sickness of the spirit from a perfect world. But it must always use the life we live as the material of its joyous vision. It is born of our double attachment to Earth and to Paradise. There is no formula for absolute beauty, but the poet can praise the echo and reflection of it in the songs of the birds and the colors of the flowers. It is open to question whether

"There is a fountain filled with blood"

expresses the home-sickness of the spirit as yearningly as

"And ever my heart with pleasure fills  
And dances with the daffodils."

There are many details on which we would like to join issue with Sir Henry Newbolt, but his main contentions are so suggestive, his sympathies so catholic and generous, that it seems hardly worth while arguing with him about questions of scansion and of the relation of Blake to contemporary politics, or of the evil of anthologies. His book is the reply of a capable and honest man of letters to the challenge uttered to poets by Keats in "The Fall of Hyperion," where Moneta demands:—

"What benefits canst thou, or all thy tribe  
To the great world?"

and declares:—

"None can usurp this height . . .  
But those to whom the miseries of the world  
Are misery, and will not let them rest."

Sir Henry Newbolt, like Sir Sidney Colvin, no doubt, would hold that here Keats dismisses too slightly his own best work. But how noble is Keats's dissatisfaction with himself! It is such noble dissatisfaction as this that distinguishes the great poets from the amateurs. Poetry and religion—the impulse is very much the same. The rest is but a parlor-game.

ROBERT LYND.

## A DERELICT.

"The Life of John Payne." By THOMAS WRIGHT. (Fisher Unwin. 28s.)

THE claim made by his friend for the work of Mr. John Payne is by no means a modest one. Take him as original poet or translator, says Mr. Wright, he "was undoubtedly the greatest English man of letters of the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries." Of his original work when it is carefully studied—instead of being, as at present, shamefully neglected—"he will be found to have been equalled by no poet of his time with the exception of Swinburne." "As a translator he reigns supreme. In the particular department of prose work which he made specially his own, no other writer in any age or country can be named in the same breath with him." This is high praise, not from some youthful exuberant, but from the discriminating biographer of Burton, Cowper, and Walter Pater. Mr. Wright thinks Payne has even succeeded in consecrating and glorifying the respectable if undistinguished suburb in which he lived: "He has given to Kilburn (and who before ever heard of Kilburn?) a literary prominence of the kind that belongs to a Shiraz, an Avignon, a Weimar."

But although 10, Oxford Road, Kilburn, may have called response to the Pines, Putney, flying unnoticed flags across a litter of irrelevant lives, it is a long way from either to Persia or Provence; and it is a long way from John Payne to Petrarch and Goethe. Mr. Wright has all our sympathy in hitting out in defence of a writer whose original work was unaccountably neglected: neglected while critics and even that limited portion of the public which glances at poetry before hurrying by, hailed as immortal the work of lesser men, now fortunately dead. Portions of his autobiography in part printed here by Mr. Wright, form "a new and extraordinary 'Dunciad'" filled with sweeping condemnation of certain popular critics and poets amongst his contemporaries. Mr. Wright prints the names of the living in asterisks in number equivalent to the letters of each name: and an interesting guessing competition amongst those familiar with the would-be poets and critics of the last three decades, might fill in the missing personalities: "very well known men of letters alive to-day." A five-lettered title bracketed with Lang is easily recognizable. There is a general condemnation by Payne of everything Scotch, associated with Lang, Stevenson ("a plagiarist built up of Daniel Defoe and Captain Marryat"), and the Kailyard School. To the verse-makers amongst a gibbeted nine he gave the name of the "Poets of the Deliquescence"—they were "nearly all water." The critics he accused of conspiracy and corruption. "It is, I imagine, little known in America," he wrote in 1902, "how completely corrupt is the contemporary English literary press, which is altogether worked by a rigorous combine of two or three cliques, the members of which employ their powers solely for the glorification of themselves and their fellow-riggers of the market and the crushing out of notice of all who do not belong to their gang." There was much, in that time, to justify this charge. Nevertheless Payne could not claim for his work the quality or the reception of Shelley or Keats or the early Browning. He suffered indeed from one curious treatment which seems to have embittered him. His early work, imaginative and sometimes passionate, but immature—received high praise from the masters of the age—Rossetti, Swinburne, and the rest. His later work, produced after a long interval of twenty years, and incomparably finer both in thought and expression, received neither notice nor praise from anyone. Yet examination of all shows something lacking. There is thought in it, imagination, passion, often fine phrasing and dexterous use of exacting metre. It is difficult to analyze precisely what is absent. There seems, curiously enough for a great translator, to be a certain woodenness in the words, an inability to fire thought with expression, a lack of that ultimate, inexplicable charm which distinguishes fine verse from unchallengeable poetry. Nothing of Payne's can sweep the reader off his feet like even the casual reading of the "Forsaken Garden" or the "Triumph of Time." Curiously enough the translations of this great writer read like original poetry and the original poetry like translations. Whole pages of the "Villon," for example, show complete absence of that cramping demand for the right synonym which of necessity mars nine-tenths even of the greatest translations. These

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flow on as if the author is free to use any word he pleases; and in the end they prove not only the most musical, but also the most accurate. But in the original poems, the critic is brought up suddenly—like, in a famous simile, "swallowing a fish-bone"—against words archaic, clumsy, suddenly taking the light out of some Sonnet (say) which otherwise had been swinging joyfully forward: and the reader half-unconsciously comments that this is, of course, necessary in a translation where the sense does not always allow the perfectly correct word. Those who admire his work could select some of it without which no English anthology could be complete: but they should not place it with the work of the immortals.

But much more can be definitely claimed for Payne's work as a translator. Here you are passing from talent to genius. The "Villon" and the "Arabian Nights" will never be superseded or seriously challenged. The "Hafiz" is a monumental work of extraordinary ability. The "Omar Khayyam" only fails because the reader has in his ear the work of another—unscrupulous, incomplete, but with the quality of magic in it. In the efforts to translate Heine and the songs of the later French poets he has at least gone nearer than anyone to achieving the unattainable. These and others formed an immense output, taking up the greater part of his days, exhausting his nervous energy and leaving him, at the end, blind. They secured for him modest monetary reward, although published privately, and could have secured him more, had he desired it, from collectors of "rare and curious books." But his object was literature. And he was more content with the friends it brought him, especially with the leaders of French literature, and the knowledge that he had done service in the world of letters.

Payne's outward life was uneventful, and except for one extraordinary episode of ideal and sustained passion, that of a shy literary student living in a London suburb. He was born in London in 1842 of a Devonshire family, comfortable but declining into poverty. Before he was twenty he had been clerk to an auctioneer, assistant in a newspaper office, and an usher in schools, "the horrors of which," he afterwards declared, "would have furnished a new circle in Dante's hell." He possessed a natural genius for languages and as a boy self-taught he had made translations of the whole of Dante, much of Goethe, Lessing and Calderon, besides many poems from Spanish, Portuguese, Arabic, Turkish, and Persian. At nineteen family prosperity revived and he settled down in a solicitor's office; subsequently to carry on, for the greater part of his life, most efficiently and successfully, the work of a conveyancing and Chancery lawyer. All his life was outside this service. Early he joined with Arthur O'Shaughnessy and J. T. Nettlehip in forming a Triumvirate devoted to the study and production of art and literature. The Triumvirate, through the friendliness of Madox Browne, became intimate with the wider circle then rapidly achieving fame, now associated with the work of Rossetti, Morris, and Swinburne. All the three formed an ardent admiration for a Mrs. Helen Snee, a little woman of extraordinary attraction of body and mind, the young wife of a devoted traveller in beer for Messrs. Buss, of Burton-on-Trent. O'Shaughnessy addressed to her his first passionate volume of love poems. "As it was her loveliness and intellect that first prompted him to write, so she herself is the sole burden of his song." Her attitude to Payne, judged by her letters—always addressed to "Mr. Payne"—was that of respect for a scholar and a man of genius. But for Payne—shy, exclusive, passionate—she became "a goddess such as neither earth nor Olympus ever saw," the ideal Helen of Poe's verse. She was beautiful, and full of nervous fears. On one occasion she advertised for a medical student to discuss poisons with her. Her correspondence was discovered, both were arrested and sentenced to terms of imprisonment for conspiracy to effect suicide: although she maintained she never seriously contemplated such an action. She survived this ordeal and was tenderly nursed by her husband, who was devoted to her: but she died four years afterwards, at the age of thirty-five. Payne had helped generously in the legal proceedings, but he had not seen her for a year before she died. Her death left him utterly crushed and broken. Its influence was as that of Mrs. Rossetti on her husband, or

rather (in no absurd comparison, as maintained by Mr. Wright) as that of the death of Beatrice on Dante. When it came "he was struck dumb," says his biographer. "His Muse was utterly silenced, his hand refused to write. His heart died within him." For close on twenty years—the years of mature production—he wrote no original poetry. Helen Snee had been a lover of roses, and after her death he could never bear their smell. At the end appeared his "Vita Nuova," the "Carol and Cadence," incomparably the finest volume of his verse: devoted to the memory of his immortal love. "Her Grave," the greatest of all his lyrical verse, will secure a permanent place in literature. Few could have realized as they saw this skilled lawyer at his work or applauded his supreme art as a translator, or only saw a shy, black-bearded, undistinguished-looking man travelling to a suburban home, what remembrance of a dead woman had consumed him like fire.

His work continued unabated. It was often carried out under remarkable conditions. The great "Arabian Nights" translation was completed on the top of the London omnibus:—

"Payne loved to 'segregate himself in a crowd.' These were the days of horse buses, and passengers by them anywhere in London must often have looked on with perplexity at the foreign-looking, near-sighted man—oblivious of the movement and roar around him—raising, now an Arabic manuscript, and now a sheaf of flimsy foolscap, to his eyes. They would have been still more perplexed had they known that he had boarded the bus without troubling where it was going, that he went wherever it chose to carry him, and that he got off only when it refused, point blank, to carry him an inch further. The fascinating pages of the 'Arabian Nights' are the sequel to those nondescript journeys."

He came, in middle age, to "settle down" in life. If it gave him less than he asked, it had given him more than he expected. He was a lover and a good judge of good food and drink. He read a novel every day of his life. He possessed a group of a few devoted friends—none more so than the writer of this most interesting biography. He hated fiercely—not only literary critics, but also everything "liberal" in politics—and composed bitter poems against Bright and Gladstone. He hated also the current religion of his day and composed invective in verse against the contemporary gods then worshipped. He entertained a high view of the value of his original work, and his latter days were embittered by the lack of recognition. But although essentially sad in temperament he could always find refuge in laughter. Mr. Wright records many dialogues and conversations of men and books which add greatly to the interest of the narrative and give a vivid picture of Payne's mind. He died in February, 1916, blind, and after much suffering, of old age and the too severe work of a lifetime. In the critical year of the war no notice was taken of his decease. "Among the little treasures found after his death among his belongings were a portrait of 'Helen' and a lock of that golden hair which he had so often sung."

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simplicity, without a trace of bitterness, as history, not as polemic. But he has little difficulty in tearing to pieces that tissue of falsehoods and concealments with which Mr. George doped the House of Commons in the famous "Maurice Debate." In March 1918, Haig's fighting strength was weaker (in rifle and sabre strength) by 180,000 men than in the previous March. [Mr. George made the comparison with January, 1917, and included in his numbers unarmed laborers and Chinese coolies.] Twenty-eight additional miles of front were taken over from the French—despite Haig's protest—a few weeks before the German attack on this very place—which had received no adequate fortification or trench defence. Warnings enough were given that the Germans would attack here at the very date the attack was opened. But Mr. George was obsessed with the idea that the trench system on the Western Front was fixed in an unalterable stalemate and that our function was to climb into Germany by Eastern windows only. "He considered," says General Maurice with quiet irony, "that by instituting the Versailles Council and its later development, the Executive Military Committee of the Council, he had counterbalanced the advantage which the Germans had in the West in a single homogeneous army under one commander, and he refused both to meet the demands of the soldiers for men to fill the depleted ranks in France and to transfer troops from Palestine to France."

The result was that Ludendorff flung forty divisions of picked troops against Gough's fourteen, overwhelmed the Fifth Army, and nearly broke through the Allied line to Abbeville and the sea. Although at last stayed the enemy had a great triumph to record. They had flung back the British line upon Amiens, inflicted on us in less than six weeks more than 300,000 casualties, and captured—besides 1,000 British guns and an immense amount of ammunition and stores—more than 70,000 prisoners. This is General Maurice's summary of the disastrous event: "Such was the price which we had to pay for our failure to prepare adequately for a menace which had long been foreseen." The defeat was forgotten in the subsequent victory: but it will be recorded in history as the result of the interference of the amateur strategist in the difficult business of war.

In the summary of the results of Armageddon General Maurice has to maintain two positions, the complete reconciliation of which is difficult. On the one hand he endeavors to show that Ludendorff and the German Army had received a knock-out blow in actions which had effected a decision. On the other, he has to explain our action in accepting the Armistice of November 11th instead of rounding up the whole German Army in a gigantic Sedan. He shows perhaps less than his customary generosity to the defeated foe. He quotes in full the statement made on behalf of Ludendorff to the leaders of the Reichstag on October 2nd by his representative Major Freiherr von der Bussche (the substance of which is given in Ludendorff's memoirs). He describes this statement as "the excuses and explanations of men who find themselves beaten and are endeavoring to shuffle out of their responsibility." This is certainly not the impression made on the ordinary reader, to whom this statement seems—read in the light of after events—to be an extraordinarily truthful and sincere account of the actual situation of Germany. He cannot reconcile Hindenburg's and Ludendorff's fierce pressure for an Armistice and projected terms of peace, and at the same time appeals to the home Government and people to stand firm.

But surely there is no need to look to any occult or vacillating explanation concerning a policy which Ludendorff himself in his memoirs had made transparently clear. He was beaten and he knew that he was beaten. His design was to save what he could from the wreck. He desired an armistice to reorganize his defence. He desired to know terms of peace which might be terms which Germany could honorably accept. But he never contemplated unconditional surrender, his forces of further resistance were not exhausted, and sooner than accept such a peace as eventually came he would have fought on to the last man and the last rifle. General Maurice at the end has to confess that such a resistance was not impossible. In October and early November the advance slackened down. It was found impossible to keep up the supply over the broken ground. The German Army was retiring to fresh positions according

to plan. The nonsense written for the British public—of whole divisions fleeing from the British forces in panic leaving only courageous machine-gunners to certain suicide—is revealed here in its futility. Where the German divisions were told to retire they retired. Where the machine-gunners were told to put up rearguard fights they did so. At all the critical points in the great defeat the Germans resisted stoutly and took heavy toll of their attackers. There was never a *saute qui peut*; everywhere bridges, roads, and railways were destroyed as they retired. Their total losses were enormous, but there was nothing approaching a Jena and an Auerstadt, a Metz, or a Waterloo. In the South the Americans were never able to close the gap of Treves, though they had thrown into their disastrous offensive 630,000 American troops in the Meuse-Argonne battle against some forty German divisions. General Maurice does his best to minimize the confusion, the hopeless Staff work and the break-down which resulted in this useless slaughter of brave men. But it was evident that neither here nor further South in the projected attack in Lorraine had the German High Command very much to fear from the Americans. Ludendorff was dismissed by the Kaiser when conducting a masterly retreat (the evacuation of Belgium was part of a general plan of withdrawal admirably conducted), and the Kaiser in his turn was dismissed by the nation set upon peace at any price, and deluded by the promise of President Wilson's Fourteen Points, which were subsequently to become scraps of paper.

It is an interesting military problem which may be discussed for generations: what might have happened if the spirit of the people and the Army had held (they were never fighting on German soil) as the spirit of the South held after Vicksburg and Gettysburg or the spirit of Napoleon's conscripts in the amazing campaign of 1814. The losses had been enormous. In four months the Allied Armies had captured 385,000 prisoners and nearly 7,000 guns. General Maurice estimates the enemy killed and wounded at 1½ millions. He provides no data for this enormous total, which is probably a very considerable over-estimate. But the loss of the Allies had been very heavy, and it is evident, from General Maurice's conclusions—and he was visiting the whole field a few days after the Armistice—that the pursuit had practically to cease. "Everywhere I was told that the Allied Armies, which were on or were marching towards the Meuse, had on November 11th reached, or very nearly reached the farthest limit at which for the time being they could be kept regularly supplied." "The Germans were very active and skilful in damaging the roads and railways before they retreated, and this damage was extended by the destructive power of the infantry on both sides."

General Maurice shows by detailed, convincing argument that in face of the facts the refusal of the Armistice would have been a profoundly mistaken decision. Had the people held behind him Ludendorff has told us in his memoirs he had still 600,000 soldiers to call up from the depôts behind, he had at least another half million wounded who would rejoin before the spring, further classes of young conscripts were maturing. Had William II. possessed the spirit of Louis XIV. and Germany responded as France responded to a Royal appeal after Malplaquet, peace might have come nearer to the Peace of Utrecht than to the peace of Paris. But the Blockade had destroyed the national spirit; the people refused the last resistance, and Germany fell as no great Empire has fallen, suddenly and in a night. This is the best account yet published of the military events which preceded that fall.

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idiom, somewhat repellent on acquaintance, makes itself accepted and enjoyed on a longer stay. He is not a graceful or smooth poet, and one would imagine that the poetic art is with him a severe and difficult discipline through which the laborious days are sometimes all too evident, but which makes victory greatly worth while, when it is achieved over a stubborn material. In this volume he cares nothing about fitting up a uniformity of rhyme-sounds ("slayer" pairs readily with "fair," and so on), and his effects are sometimes about as beautiful as a slag-heap—"You are done for if he knows you ass," "He'd kill a pig; why not a German?" and others of their kind. But the ugly and grotesque element in Mr. Hewlett's verse is in a way a tribute to him, because it is an unconscious confession that he will put up with no literary tricks and dodges, the ruin of so much modern poetizing. His eye is cocked fiercely on what he is writing about and out comes the poetry in the end, soaked in his own language, his own personality, his own vision, because they are the last thing he bothers himself about. He is singularly free of the literary vices, and there is never a sign of his exploiting his material in the "that will make a smart costume" style of the fluent versifier. So that when words and music go really well with him:—

"Underneath those folded downs  
Outposts of the long-spent wave,  
Men are lying, and their towns,  
All are dust, and in one grave.

Or:—

What people had a home here  
Long and long ago?  
What man used to come here  
With his yew bow?  
What women used to roam here  
When the light was low?

There's no fear of foeman now,  
Nor of Druid's knife,  
Nor man to love woman now,  
Nor life to ask life!  
Dust is the Bowman now,  
And dust is his wife,"

we get the true feel of fine poetry, which enfolds yesterday, to-day, and to-morrow, but is not of them. Except for a strong and beautiful poem on "Daisies" and others, not quite so good, on "Anemones" and "Night-Stock," the rest of the book does not reach this level. But Mr. Hewlett's poetry is as real as a cart-horse thudding a wet lane or a storm-cock shouting in hard rain—vastly superior, that is to say, to the greenhouse or railway-station verse written so copiously to-day.

The Poet Laureate is, in "October and Other Poems," to be found only at his office, and there is no admission except on business:—

"They'll rage like bulls sans reason or rhyme,  
And next day, as if 'twere a pantomime,  
They walk in like cows at milking-time,  
On a grey November morning.

We're four years sick of the pestilent mob;  
—You've heard of our biblical *Battle in Job*?—  
At times it was hardly a gentleman's job  
Of a grey November morning."

This is Beatty addressing Nelson at the surrender of the German ships, and Nelson replies:—

"Well, thanks f'your chat,  
Forgive my intrusion! I take off my hat  
And make you my bow. . . we'll leave it at that.  
This grey November morning."

Dr. Bridges's rampant "to beauty through blood" hardly convinces us that the "unacknowledged legislators" would be the best advisers in a national crisis. Still, we must not forget that a Poet Laureate is only a polite term for Poet Ornate. The curious thing is that there is no more than a slight trace of beauty even in the non-professional poems collected into this book. They rarely move a step further than the metrical exercise.

Mr. Graves is a poet of charm and skill, and a promise of something more. But the latter is scarcely fulfilled in this volume. There was a danger that his brilliant fancies and gift of melody might take him into a poetic siding, and "Country Sentiment" (a most disarming title) tends to see it realized. Mr. Graves can hit off a nursery rhyme with delightful ease, but life (unlike the greater part of this volume) is not made up of nursery rhymes, and they are

not quite so supremely good as to compensate us for the sense of pointlessness with which we close it. That is the worst of the torrent of middling verse written nowadays. It becomes an accomplishment rather than a destiny and a reality, and more and more dissociated from truth and reality. One is inclined to think, from one of his best poems in the book ("A Ballad of Nursery Rhyme"), that Mr. Graves is riding his natural bent with a spur, making nursery rhymes, that is to say, as a deliberate reaction against:—

"Blasphemers trusting to hold caught  
In far-flung webs of ink,  
The utmost ends of human thought  
Till rotting; left to stink."

"Country Sentiment" shows a happy turn for a particular genre; it is a pity that it is not that something more for which we are entitled to ask.

There is nothing to set even the Isis on fire in the latest issue of "Oxford Poetry." The tendency in young poets to anthropomorphize is too evident here and is the opposite of a healthy animism. You can see it in a line like "The thrush throbs out his mournful melody," which no thrush except a poet's ever did. We are not sure indeed that the tendency of young poets to rush into print on the smallest provocation is not debasing the poetic currency. Mr. Armstrong and Mr. Lyon are perhaps the best in the book; the others scarcely achieve more than metrical facility. We are surprised to see that Mr. E. C. Blunden is not represented, he being still an undergraduate. Perhaps it is just as well for the uniformity of the volume.

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